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FROM THE COEUR D'ALENE PRESS

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FROM THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Otter planning for budget cuts

Tax revenue forecast down nearly 6 percent

September 18, 2008

BOISE – Idaho Gov. Butch Otter is drawing up plans to cut the state budget midyear by at least \$27 million and possibly as much as \$68 million, after an ailing economy forced a rewrite of Idaho's expected tax revenues for the year.

Under revised forecasts, Idaho now expects to collect \$174.3 million – 5.9 percent less in taxes this year than expected. State rainy day funds could cover the shortfall, but Otter has opted to look at budget cuts instead, anticipating that the reserve funds will be needed to offset additional shortfalls in the coming year.

"He chose not to use that rainy day money because, quite honestly ... it's going to be raining for a while, it appears," said Wayne Hammon, Otter's budget chief.

The governor Wednesday asked state agency heads to prepare three budgets, cutting their spending this year by 1 percent, 2 percent and 2.5 percent. All cuts would be permanent, except for public schools – which officials would protect from any cuts this year by tapping into the public school stabilization fund.

That fund, designed to offset shortfalls in school funding, now contains \$118 million. A 1 percent general fund budget cut for public schools in Idaho would amount to \$14.2 million; 2 percent, \$28.4 million; 2.5 percent, \$35.5 million.

"The good news is it's enough," Hammon said.

Idaho also has \$140.6 million sitting in its budget stabilization fund, the state's main rainy-day account, and \$66.7 million in what legislators have dubbed an "economic recovery reserve fund." At this point, neither of those funds would be tapped.

"I think that the governor is taking prudent steps in light of what we see happening with our revenues and our economy," said state Sen. Shawn Keough, R-Sandpoint, vice chairwoman of the Legislature's joint budget committee. She added, "I hope things get better."

If ordered, it would be Otter's first midyear budget cut, commonly referred to as a "holdback." But the governor emphasized that a final decision hasn't been made.

"I am not going to ask anybody to cut their budgets unless it is absolutely necessary," Otter said. "I am hoping for the best, I am absolutely hoping for the best. But I am planning for the worst."

Idaho joins several other states bracing for revenue shortfalls.

The problem is much more bleak for state budget-writers in Washington, where lawmakers fear a shortfall of more than \$2.5 billion over the next two years. Some lawmakers say they'll likely tap a newly created rainy day fund as well as the state's other savings, but even if they drain both, which is unlikely, Washington's government would still be short hundreds of millions of dollars. A state economic projection – expected to contain more bad news – is due out today.

In anticipation of the budget crunch, Gov. Chris Gregoire recently called for a hiring freeze on nonessential state and higher-education staffers. The state is also curtailing travel, equipment purchases and other costs to try to minimize the financial damage. Gregoire's challenger, Republican Dino Rossi, says the changes are nowhere near enough.

In Idaho, Otter met with House Speaker Lawrence Denney, R-Midvale, and Senate President Pro-tem Bob Geddes, R-Soda Springs, on Monday before making the announcement Wednesday.

Last year, frugal lawmakers cut more than \$40 million from the budget Otter proposed for this year out of fear of an economic downturn, though the state had been piling up surpluses. That budgetary caution plus earlier surpluses make Otter's proposed holdbacks much smaller than the full \$174.3 million revenue shortfall.

Hammon said the proposed holdbacks and the state savings accounts will "get us several years through a bad economy, hopefully – knock on wood."

When Idaho's state revenue forecasts were re-examined in August, shortages were identified in all areas – income tax, sales tax, corporate taxes and miscellaneous revenues.

State Superintendent of Public Schools Tom Luna said Idaho's schools are "fortunate" that the school stabilization fund will cover any cuts.

"I am grateful to the Idaho Legislature for having the foresight to create this fund in 2003 and then to deposit \$100 million into it in 2006 to help deal with tough economic times like we are experiencing today," Luna said. However, he urged local school boards and districts to carefully watch spending, "to ensure that we are spending every taxpayer dollar efficiently and effectively, especially during these tough economic times."

Idaho budget cuts

The most recent midyear budget cuts ordered by Idaho governors:

2003: Gov. Dirk Kempthorne ordered a 3.5 percent holdback on all state agencies except public schools and higher education. He later lowered it to 1.9 percent for the state Department of Health and Welfare.

2002: Kempthorne ordered a 2 percent holdback on state agencies, 1.5 percent for public schools. When shortfalls continued, he ordered an additional 1 percent across the board. It was the first permanent holdback on public schools in Idaho.

1997: Gov. Phil Batt ordered a 2.5 percent holdback in September and recommended offsetting cuts to public schools from the state's budget reserve fund. Improving revenues in the spring allowed the school funding to be replaced.

1996: Batt ordered a 2 percent temporary holdback on state agencies and schools; lawmakers covered the school funding from budget reserves.

1992: Gov. Cecil Andrus vetoed a legislative decision for a 1.1 percent holdback on agencies other than schools, but allowed the cut to stand for the legislative and judicial branches; he then ordered a 0.3 percent holdback in May when revenues continued to slip.

1986: Gov. John Evans ordered a 2.5 percent holdback, but the Legislature responded with a 4.5 percent cut passed over the governor's veto. Sales taxes were raised temporarily from 4 percent to 5 percent; the increase later became permanent.

FROM THE MOSCOW PULLMAN DAILY NEWS (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

IDAHO: Otter, WWAMI official agree on need to expand medical education options

Legislative committee considering options for increasing medical school access

By Halley Griffin, Daily News staff writer

Posted on: Wednesday, September 17, 2008

Andrew Turner agrees with Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter's opinion that access to medical education in Idaho needs to be improved.

Otter spokesman Jon Hanian said the governor is concerned about the ability of a cooperative program between the University of Washington School of Medicine and schools from Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho to keep doctors in Idaho and get them to medically underserved areas.

Turner, director of the WWAMI program for the University of Idaho and Washington State University, said the schools are doing what they can.

"It's true we don't meet the needs for physicians, but we only have 20 funded seats (in the WWAMI program)," he said.

WWAMI was formed with the goal of providing medical education at in-state tuition rates to students from states that do not have their own medical schools, as well as students from other Washington colleges and universities.

The difference between out-of-state UW School of Medicine tuition and what Idaho students pay is picked up by the state of Idaho, Turner said, so students only pay about \$20,000 per year.

There are only 20 spots available each year for Idaho students in the WWAMI program and eight from another cooperative with the University of Utah Medical School, a number Turner says lags behind national averages.

Otter expressed his concerns Monday during a meeting of a legislative interim committee on medical education.

Hanian said the program was developed in the 1970s, and Idaho has since become one of the nation's fastest-growing states. The WWAMI program has not grown to meet the needs of a greater population.

According to the American Medical Association, Idaho currently ranks 49th in the nation for the ratio of doctors to residents. Forty percent of those doctors are at least 55 years old. As those physicians begin to retire, Idaho is not producing enough new doctors to replace them, Hanian said.

Turner said he believes the WWAMI program does a great job with the resources it receives from the state, but he'd love to double or triple the 20 state-funded seats in the program.

"We need to play catch-up," he said. "We can't just hit the national average, we need to hit above it."

Turner is worried about how Idaho will be able to pay for increased medical education options.

"The question is how much can the state afford it in a time when higher education resources are already tight," Turner said. "The pie for higher education is too small."

He said the goal of the legislative committee is to determine the best possible model that the state can afford. Idaho State University leaders have argued that Idaho should develop its own medical school, rather than continue relying on the WWAMI program.

Hanian said the governor believes the WWAMI program can be improved and expanded as one option for improving medical education access for Idaho students.

An Idaho State Board of Education subcommittee on medical education will meet next week in Boise. The dean of the UW School of Medicine is scheduled to attend the legislative committee's Nov. 12 meeting.

POTLATCH: School board votes to settle teacher salary dispute

Posted on: Wednesday, September 17, 2008

The Potlatch School Board voted unanimously Tuesday evening to sign a contract for the 2008-09 school year with the teacher's union.

The school board and the Potlatch Education Association are reviewing the contract and are expected to sign it as soon as board chairman Doug Scoville and PEA president Jeanette Rogers are able to sit down together.

Potlatch Superintendent Joe Kren said the PEA indicated that it would accept the new contract.

The dispute arose in November over the salary increase percentage in teacher salaries. The Potlatch Education Association requested a base pay raise of 5 percent, while the school board said the district could not afford an increase of more than 2.5 percent.

The school board will still offer a 2.5-percent base pay increase, but has recalculated the salary scale so the difference in raises are spread more evenly across the scale of teacher education and experience.

FROM THE LEWISTON TRIBUNE (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

Does Otter want new med school or not? (editorial)

Jim Fisher

Thursday, September 18, 2008

It's no wonder that Gov. Butch Otter was called on Tuesday to explain his charge of the previous day that the interstate program through which Idaho students become doctors "is not doing its job." It's also less than surprising that his explanation was delivered in the form of an e-mailed audio recording.

That prevented questions about where the governor really stands on the issue of creating a new medical school in a state not known for its investments in higher education.

Last year, Otter asked a hand-picked group of people at a "health care summit" to propose a plan for such a school. But after he did, the doors to the summit were closed and the proceedings were kept from the people of Idaho.

Meanwhile, Idaho State University President Arthur Vailas continued pushing for the new school, but one he calls "distributive," meaning it would not necessarily comprise a stand-alone institution on Vailas' campus. And some otherwise tight-fisted legislators from southeastern Idaho, including Senate President Pro Tem Bob Geddes of Soda Springs, have remained friendly to the idea.

Monday, Otter told a special legislative committee considering the matter that Idaho is failing to attract enough physicians, and criticized the WWAMI (Wyoming, Washington, Alaska, Montana and Idaho) program through which med students from the four less populous states complete their medical education at the University of Washington in Seattle.

"I'm terribly disappointed in WWAMI," the Idaho State Journal of Pocatello quoted Otter saying. "It's not doing its job."

Later, while revising and extending his remarks on a digital recording, Otter denied saying WWAMI is not a good program. He said Idaho has not paid for enough seats in it to ensure that more doctors practice in Idaho. And he said paying for them is "one of the things they (committee members) ought to take a look at."

They sure should. Legislators have spent \$300,000 on a feasibility study for a new med school when they could have put 22 more Idaho students into the WWAMI program for about \$1 million per year. The state currently reserves 28 spaces in the program.

An Idaho medical school would be far more expensive.

Otter also said he's troubled that placing students in WWAMI does not guarantee they will return to Idaho to practice. But the same would be true of a domestic medical school. He suggested the state consider a loan forgiveness program for physicians who do practice in the state, but again, that can be done as easily with WWAMI graduates as with those from an Idaho school.

So what exactly does the governor want here? It's long past time he made it clear. To date, his failure to do so has made him look like something no one ever expected of Butch Otter: wishy-washy. - J.F.

FROM THE IDAHO-PRESS TRIBUNE, NAMPA

Otter: Make plans to cut

GOVERNMENT: Governor warns of state budget shortfall, directs agencies to find possible ways to reduce spending

By Todd Dvorak
The Associated Press

BOISE — Gov. Butch Otter on Wednesday ordered top state administrators and department heads to revisit their 2009 budgets and find ways to save money to offset a nearly 6 percent projected shortfall in state revenue.

In a letter to the administrators, Otter said the revisions are necessary because of the downturns in the state and national economies that have left Idaho's general fund with \$174.3 million less than anticipated.

By Wednesday, Otter wants each state agency and department to submit three new versions of their Fiscal Year 2009 budgets for review. The revised spending plans should account for cuts, or holdbacks, of 1 percent, 2 percent and 2 1/2 percent, according to the letter, which was also sent to state lawmakers.

"If we stay on our forecast, we're going to be short of making the state budget," Budget Director Wayne Hammon said. "I don't see Idaho falling off the edge of the Earth, either. But if things continue to go the way they are trending, we are going to have to make some cuts to stay on budget."

The Department of Financial Management projects revenue for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2009, which began July 1, at \$2.766 billion, down 5.9 percent from the \$2.94 billion projected in February.

Agency economists attribute the decline to factors typical during prolonged economic slumps, such as people spending less, job layoffs and stagnant corporate earnings.

In its August report, agency economists cited softening sales tax and individual income tax receipts. But the report also points to tax declines tied to the grocery tax credit and other tax-relief bills approved by lawmakers last session.

State law gives the governor the authority to impose temporary, midyear reductions in general fund spending.

Hammon said there is no target date for Otter to issue an executive order should cuts be deemed necessary. A review of the revised department budgets could begin as early as next week.

The letter does not offer department administrators specific guidance in how to draw up their revised budget proposals, though they will be expected to target areas that can lead to ongoing savings.

"We haven't identified areas to trim. They are the experts," said Jon Hanian, Otter's spokesman. "The idea here is we're preparing for the worst and hoping for the best. We're hopeful we won't have to do this, but if these projections run true, we're at least ready."

Some departments will not be affected by the cuts because they operate independently of the general fund, including the Transportation Department and Fish and Game.

CWI gets approval to offer accredited classes

EDUCATION: Through partnership with College of Southern Idaho, officials plan to have courses in January

NAMPA — The College of Western Idaho has been approved to offer classes accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, CWI officials said Wednesday.

The Nampa-based community college will begin offering general education classes in January. An agreement between CWI, the College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls and the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities will allow CWI students

to transfer those college credits to other educational institutions, as well as apply for federal education assistance.

The Northwest Commission is one of six regional commissions in the United States that certifies the quality and soundness of a college's academic programs, library, administrative infrastructure and financial affairs.

The College of Western Idaho and CSI have partnered to complete an agreement that enables CWI to offer general education credit classes through the College of Southern Idaho's accreditation oversight. This agreement will continue until CWI completes its own regional accreditation within an estimated three to four years.

In the meantime, CWI must demonstrate a commitment to adequate fiscal and administrative resources, the integrity of its academic infrastructure, adequacy of its services to students, and the quality of its academic programming, officials said.

"Offering accredited classes will make the entire Idaho education system stronger and our processes more seamless for our students," CWI President Dennis Griffin said in a prepared statement. "This is a major indication for what we will be able to offer to our community."

FROM THE IDAHO STATESMAN

Gov. Butch Otter warns officials to prepare for Idaho budget holdbacks

Governor Otter talks about why he took these steps and informing lawmakers.

Gov. Butch Otter talks about the recent letter he sent out to his agency directors asking them to prepare budgets for potential holdbacks.

Gov. Butch Otter says that just because we are planning for possible holdbacks does not necessarily mean they will happen.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

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FY2009 shortfall table

Questions and answers concerning DFM memo on FY 2009 general fund shortfall

BY TODD DVORAK - THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Edition Date: 09/18/08

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Some departments will not be affected by the cuts because their revenues come from sources other than the general fund, including the Transportation Department, whose revenues come from fuel taxes, and Fish and Game, which collects hunting and fishing license fees.

Otter said cuts will not directly affect public schools because any money dropped from that budget would be offset with money drawn from a separate Public Education Stabilization Fund,

created by lawmakers in 2003 and bolstered with \$100 million during a special session two years ago.

Idaho is not alone among states struggling to make ends meet.

Last week, Hawaii Gov. Linda Lingle issued emergency orders for the state to cut spending to balance a deficit that could reach \$1 billion by June 2010.

Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland, facing an estimated \$540 million shortfall, ordered budget cuts last week that could lead to layoffs of hundreds of state workers and closure of two state mental hospitals.

New community college set for accredited classes

- The Associated Press
Edition Date: 09/17/08

NAMPA, Idaho — Idaho's newest community college has permission to begin offering accredited classes starting next year.

Officials say the College of Western Idaho recently earned formal approval to offer classes accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. That group is one of six nationwide that certifies the quality of college academic programs.

That key step was made possible through an agreement with the College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls. Administrators at the two schools agreed to join forces until the College of Western Idaho completes its own accreditation process in the next three to four years.

The announcement means CWI can begin offering classes starting in January 2009 that students can use to transfer to other schools and obtain federal financial aid.

FROM THE TWIN FALLS TIMES-NEWS

Otter warns of possible budget shortfall

By TODD DVORAK

BOISE, Idaho - Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter on Wednesday ordered top state administrators and department heads to revisit their 2009 budgets and find ways to save money to offset a nearly 6 percent projected shortfall in state revenue.

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Celebrating history

Jerome marks Constitution Day with musical tributes

By Ben Botkin

Times-News writer

For Jerome School District students, patriotic music marked their celebration of Constitution Day.

Students from the district's three elementary schools filled the bleachers of Jerome High School's football field on Wednesday for a presentation from Jerome High School's "Ambush of Tigers" Marching Unit.

Constitution Day has been celebrated since 1997 and falls on the anniversary of when the U.S. Constitution was signed in 1787.

The students in Jerome heard more than music. Gordon Smith, the director of bands, also gave the students a lesson in the historical roots of the national anthem.

"One of the most important ways we recognize ourselves as a country is the national anthem," Smith said.

Smith told the students about Francis Scott Key, who wrote "The Star-Spangled Banner." As the story goes, Key wrote the now-famous words after watching the British bombard Fort McHenry in Baltimore during the War of 1812.

"He knew that if that fort fell, so did the United States," Smith said.

After that battle, which took place in 1814, Key saw the flag still flying, a reminder that the United States - and the Constitution - remained. Back then, the flag had 15 stars.

On Wednesday, the students turned and faced a flag with 50 stars that stood for the same Constitution and sang the national anthem as the band played.

"Our flag is to your right, flying proudly over the school," Smith said.

The high school band also performed "West Side Story 2008," a musical and marching show that it will perform throughout the year.

The event was a good way for "Ambush of Tigers" to do a performance and teach students at the same time about the history behind patriotic music, Smith said.

"We said, 'Constitution Day would be the perfect time,'" he said.

For the band students learning under Smith, the performance echoed what he's taught them about music's history.

"I think it's good that he would tell the people about it," said Schae Lohnes, a flute player and captain of the color guard.

Tina Chandler, a saxophone player and member of the color guard, said she appreciated that the colors guard's flags include red, white and blue.

Is Otter about to endorse a med school? (editorial)

Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter tossed WWAMI overboard this week. The program that reserves spots for Idaho students at the University of Washington School of Medicine isn't up to meeting the growing need for doctors in the state, the governor told a joint interim legislative committee on medical education.

WWAMI allows students from Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho to attend the medical school in Seattle for the same tuition paid by Washington students. The program encourages graduates to choose careers in family practice medicine and to work in the Northwest.

The alternatives? They're not abundant, but building a medical school in Idaho would be the chief option.

Otter didn't endorse such a plan, but has in the past said Idaho should consider it.

Trouble is, spending the millions of dollars required to build a med school in Idaho has negligible support outside Bannock County. It's popular there only because Idaho State University wants to have it.

Bruce Newcomb, former Burley legislator and Boise State University's director of government affairs, argues that building a medical school would take away money it needs to support other programs.

He's right. What, after all, does Idaho really need from medical education?

It needs physicians willing to serve patients in places like Wendell, Shoshone and Rupert.

To get that kind of commitment, the state needs something to trade - perhaps a subsidy or a tax break to help physicians newly minted at any school to whittle down student loan debts, which usually start at \$100,000.

And it needs to buy more medical school seats, most likely at the University of Utah Medical School but also potentially in Colorado, Arizona, Nevada and Oregon.

Bottom line: Idaho can't afford and doesn't need a bricks-and-mortar solution to medical education right now. We need to get doctors where we can find them, and make it worth their while to stay here.

FROM THE IDAHO STATE JOURNAL (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

Med school tools

ISU program is closest thing state has to a medical school

POCATELLO — Shannon Peck has been in Idaho State University's Physician Assistant program for roughly three weeks and is one of 100 students enrolled in the department.

ISU's PA program started a little more than a decade ago and is the closest thing to a medical school in the Gem State. Physician assistants can perform about 90 percent of their supervising doctors' duties, and some university officials consider ISU's PA program a small medical school.

For those in the PA program, it can become an avenue for landing a growing number of health profession jobs in the Northwestern U.S. or it can send much-needed staff to rural clinics hampered by doctor shortages.

Peck said she first became interested in becoming a physician assistant because her sister was one. She has considered applying the training at clinical sites in either largely rural areas or less developed countries.

And Peck has some experience. She's worked with her dad in Peru, Kenya and Indonesia before. She said that experience is a major reason she believes being a physician assistant suits her.

"You can work everywhere as a PA," Peck said. "You can move around the world and work almost anywhere."

During a recent meeting on medical education in Boise, some rural hospital representatives said having doctors can become a luxury, and that the majority of clinical staff is made up of physician assistants, nurses or people from different careers who are paid to go to back to school and study health sciences.

"We can do almost any services provided by our supervising physician," said Cynthia Bunde, a certified physician assistant who works as a service learning coordinator for ISU's program.

Bunde said some duties can include providing wellness and clinical procedures to patients, biopsies and ushering lab test results. She said physician assistants never perform work beyond the scope of their leading physician's specialties or the more focused aspects of their supervisor's

job. One example Bunde gave is that physician assistants can't place patients under anaesthesia or lead a surgical procedure.

Idaho does not have a medical school, but its three state universities provide undergraduate degrees to students who eventually go on to the University of Washington School of Medicine under the Wyoming, Washington, Alaska, Montana and Idaho Medical Education Program. The hope is that the program provides the Gem State with its future doctors.

However, ISU's PA program has had more success placing physician assistants throughout the state than WWAMI has had filling the need for doctors. Idaho is ranked 49th in the country in available doctors per capita.

During Monday's Legislative committee meeting on medical education, it was shown that about 30 percent of the university graduates from Idaho who enter WWAMI end up working in the Gem State.

Bunde said ISU's PA program return rate in Idaho is about 60 percent. The program admits more students than WWAMI, which reserves 20 Idaho seats at the University of Washington's School of Medicine.

The first year in ISU's PA program is spent mostly in the classroom, while second-year PA students are sent out to do clinical work in medical centers around the state.

John Schroeder, the department chairman and PA program director, said a majority of his students end up filling positions at clinics that suffer from doctor shortages.

"About 60 percent of our students take jobs in places where populations are less than 50,000," he said.

While ISU's PA program is playing its part in battling Idaho's health-care ills, Schroeder said the model is largely selfsufficient. He said the program has an annual budget of \$1.5 million, \$50,000 of which comes from state funding.

"Virtually all of that, except for about \$50,000, comes from fees assessed to the students," he said.

But the competition is stiff.

Schroeder said the PA program received more than 400 applications and allows only 50 students per class. He said he would like to see Idaho establish its own medical program, increasing the Gem State's training in the health sciences.

Schroeder said his program's first year curriculum is not much different than first year coursework at most medical schools.

"We train out of the same textbooks used in medical school," he said. "It's really the medical need for Idaho. Our graduates are meeting the health care needs for the state of Idaho. And if there were more physicians, it will definitely increase the amount of physician assistants working with physicians."

Enrollment numbers drop at ISU

POCATELLO — The tenthday numbers, the first reported by public universities in Idaho, show enrollment at Idaho State University is down by about 4 percent, but Larry Ford said those numbers don't reflect ISU's full attendance picture.

Ford, associate vice president for special programs and enrollment management at ISU, said Idaho requires state universities to first report their enrollment numbers based on the 10th day, the one following the last day to add or drop a class.

He said ISU's 10th day report shows that 12,653 students are enrolled at the university. That's down from 13,208 for the same day a year earlier, but is similar to the 10th day enrollment figure from 2006.

ISU's actual 10th day figures are slightly higher, however, but a glitch in one enrollment program does not reflect those students who are simultaneously going to high school and attending ISU's tech-preparatory program.

"There was a glitch in a new computer system to enroll those students," Ford said. "They are currently being put into the system manually."

He said that glitch accounts for much of the significant decline at the College of Technology that the 10th day numbers show.

"They are down about 13 percent from last year," Ford said. "Most of that, if not all of it, is due to the glitch."

The 10th day numbers also don't reflect the high school students throughout the region who are part of ISU's dual credit program. Under the program those students are receiving both high school and college credits for their course work.

"They start later and wouldn't be in the 10th day numbers," he said. "That's some of the reasons that these numbers are a little lower than they would normally be."

Ford says all universities want to increase their enrollment from year to year, but also important, if not more so, is the number of credit hours.

"The credit hours are the important numbers," Ford said. "That's what our funding is based on."

To that end, ISU fares better than the 10th day enrollment figures might imply.

Credit hours are down less than 1 percent in 2008 from 2007, Ford said. A big factor in that is the roughly 1 percent increase in the number of full-time students enrolled at ISU.

In December, when the term comes to a close and all the fluctuating is out of the way, ISU will really know how the first half of the school year went.

Ford is optimistic about the December numbers.

"I am guessing that at the end of the term the numbers will be similar to last year's," he said. "When all is said and done, our credit hours will be at the same level as last year."

Another, admittedly smaller factor, in the decline could be a decision not to offer as many remedial courses this year. Ford said many students apply and are accepted to ISU, but some require brushing up in certain subjects before they are ready to delve into the college level courses.

"Some who were accepted were told they could come, but they may not find the classes they need and might be better off to tune up their skills in those areas before coming to the university," Ford said.

Also impeding ISU's ability to expand its enrollment is the perception that the university is more of a fallback institution rather than a first choice.

"We really have to convince them that ISU is a good first choice," Ford said.

He said some students who want to remain in the area are choosing Utah State University or Brigham Young University-Idaho in Rexburg.

Ford believes ISU's programs offer a quality education and said the university is looking to attract better students.

"Our goal is to retain them once they come in and get them to a degree as quickly as possible," Ford said.

Idaho has med school resources

BOISE — State lawmakers are not favoring one particular campus over the other, but they are confident Idaho's three major universities have the resources needed to eventually sustain a medical program.

Presidents from Idaho's three major universities each presented an inventory report to the joint interim legislative committee on medical education Monday, highlighting their institutions' infrastructure, resources, programs and faculty.

The objective was to give state lawmakers an idea of the resources Idaho State University, Boise State University and the University of Idaho in Moscow could offer toward the probable establishment of a medical program in the Gem State.

Sen. Bob Geddes, R-Soda Springs, the committee's cochairman, said each university seems to have a valuable number of resources, but added his fellow lawmakers would have to consider the potential of existing medical programs and further define the health-care problems facing Idaho.

"Each and every one of our universities have resources that they can contribute, but we have to come to an agreement to outline what we have," he said.

ISU President Arthur Vailas noted his university's hospital affiliations, the existing medical residency program and the number of clinical faculty. ISU runs various residency programs, has 176 clinical faculty and affiliation agreements with 150 hospitals in the state.

Additionally, Vailas said ISU has reserved 20,600 square feet of space for medical education.

A committee member asked Vailas if ISU would have to build another building on the reserved space.

"No, no," Vailas responded, explaining that the available space is ready to accommodate classes for medical education.

While touting ISU's resources, which include a number of health science degree programs, Vailas said a medical program is possible because the state has the needed infrastructure.

He cited ISU's School of Nursing and College of Pharmacy as examples, which he said should "synergize" to propel a larger medical program.

"You want to make sure that you have an integrated system," Vailas said.

The University of Idaho, which supports expanding an existing regional medical program, touted its 132,000 square feet of space and \$11 million received in research grants.

U of I also serves as the venue for first-year state medical students participating in the Wyoming, Washington, Alaska, Montana and Idaho Medical Education Program. The U of I president said his university has received more research funding than 14 other state universities housing medical programs.

"I thought it was very enlightening and very beneficial to the committee members," said Susie Pouliot, the Idaho Medical Association's chief executive officer.

The IMA serves partly as a lobbying group on medical issues in the Gem State and is made up largely of health professionals. The organization recently passed resolutions supporting improving medical education in Idaho by means of creating a separate graduate program and expanding WWAMI.

Despite some of the contrasting views on the future of medical education in Idaho, Pouliot said her organization is mostly supporting open discussions on the issue.

Pouliot said the best move to make following the recent meeting is to continue considering the expansion of existing systems, which include WWAMI and the residency programs.

The committee Monday reflected IMA's stance, and members decided to bring in WWAMI representatives, as well as officials from the state's medical residency programs at the November meeting.

School District 25 to present boundary proposals

POCATELLO — School District 25 invites the public to three meetings Sept. 23, 25 and 30 to give input on the four high school boundary proposals. All times are at 6:30 p.m.

The Sept. 23 meeting will be at Century High School media center, Sept. 25 at the Highland High School cafeteria and Sept. 30 at Pocatello High School's media center. There will be committee members and staff available to answer questions and hear feedback.

For more information, call the district at 232-3563.

Otter warns of budget shortfall

BOISE — Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter on Wednesday ordered top state administrators and department heads to revisit their 2009 budgets and find ways to save money to offset a nearly 6 percent projected shortfall in state revenue.

In a letter to the administrators, Otter said the revisions are necessary because of the downturns in the state and national economies that have left Idaho's general fund with \$174.3 million less than anticipated.

By next Wednesday, Otter wants each state agency and department to submit three new versions of their fiscal year 2009 budgets for review. The revised spending plans should account for cuts, or holdbacks, of 1 percent, 2 percent and 2 1/2 percent, according to the letter, which was also sent to state lawmakers.

"If we stay on our forecast, we're going to be short of making the state budget," Budget Director Wayne Hammon told The Associated Press. "I don't see Idaho falling off the edge of the Earth, either. But if things continue to go the way they are trending, we are going to have to make some cuts to stay on budget."

The Department of Financial Management projects revenue for the remainder of fiscal year 2009, which began July 1, at \$2.766 billion, down 5.9 percent from the \$2.94 billion projected in February.

Agency economists attribute the decline to factors typical during prolonged economic slumps, such as people spending less, job layoffs and stagnant corporate earnings.

In its August report, agency economists cited softening sales tax and individual income tax receipts. But the report also points to tax declines tied to the grocery tax credit and other tax relief bills approved by lawmakers last session.

State law gives the governor the authority to impose temporary, midyear reductions in general fund spending.

Hammon said there is no target date for Otter to issue an executive order should cuts be deemed necessary. A review of the revised department budgets could begin as early as next week.

The letter does not offer department administrators specific guidance in how to draw up their revised budget proposals, though they will be expected to target areas that can lead to ongoing savings.

"We haven't identified areas to trim. They are the experts," said Jon Hanian, Otter's spokesman. "The idea here is we're preparing for the worst and hoping for the best. We're hopeful we won't have to do this, but if these projections run true, we're at least ready."

Some departments will not be effected by the cuts because they operate independently of the general fund, including the Transportation Department and Fish and Game.

Otter said cuts will not directly affect public schools because any funding dropped from that budget would be offset with money drawn from a separate Public Education Stabilization Fund, created by lawmakers in 2003 and bolstered with \$100 million during a special session two years ago.

FROM THE IDAHO FALLS POST REGISTER (PASSWORD REQUIRED)

Otter orders budget cuts

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Schools face their Mission: Impossible (commentary)

No Child Left Behind has failed the schools because it leaves them no option but to fail.

No Child Left Behind (and adequate yearly progress) is proof that bureaucrats and managers can destroy anything. Let me demonstrate a very few of the absurd rules districts face in the struggle to meet federal and state requirements.

Please answer the following (true or false):

1) Rules that apply one year may be completely different the next. True.

Rules have evolved from year to year, but determinations of failure remain.

2) For 2008, proficiency is 78 percent in reading/language and 70 percent in math. A school, however, can fail AYP even though proficiency scores in the "all students" category are well over 90 percent. True.

For example, after removing scores from one program, Rimrock Elementary's scores changed from reading-90 percent, math-92 percent and language-83 percent to reading-93.2 percent, math-97.7 percent and language-93.3 percent. In math, two grades, fourth and sixth, would have had 100 percent proficiency.

Rimrock is designated a failing school.

3) In AYP determinations, some students' scores can be counted in 13 of 41 areas, while others count in only four. True.

4) Students who move into our district from other states or have been home/private schooled must pass the same tests with the same proficiency as students who have been in the district for years. True. Unfortunately, most students moving into our district are substantially behind our students.

5) A student functioning several years below his/her grade must take the same test as does a gifted student. True.

Bureaucrats have determined that eventually 100 percent of our students must pass a common test, no matter their ability or capacity.

6) If a bright student purposely fails his Idaho Standards Achievement Test, that score counts against the school. True. There are no second chances.

7) If a student needs to use the restroom during the 90-minute test, a teacher must enter the bathroom with him/her to determine no cheating occurs. True.

When state compliance officials consider the possibility of cell phone texting, will this require teachers to enter the bathroom stall with students?

8) If a student is in jail, a mental health facility or homebound and dying of cancer, then this counts against a school. True.

9) If a parent believes testing is evil or unconstitutional and refuses to allow his student to test, then this counts against a school. True. We have been penalized by all of these.

10) A score can count against a school even if the student no longer lives in the district and the score is three years old. True.

I no longer believe in the beneficence of NCLB. When nonsensical regulations and policies tarnish the reputations of schools and inaccurately label them as failures, then NCLB is corrosive and detrimental to education. Meeting AYP becomes a Mission: Impossible.

Jones is director of data services at Bonneville Joint School District 93. He is writing for himself, not as a representative of the school board or the administration. You can write to him at 3497 N. Ammon Road, Idaho Falls, ID 83401.